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Linda McCulloch  
Superintendent

## **NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - JULY 10, 2003

### **"NAEP Writing Scores for Montana Students"**

Superintendent of Public Instruction Linda McCulloch today released the scores of the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Writing Test showing Montana students scoring near the national average level.

"Montana's 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students scored at or near the national average for the 2002 NAEP writing scores," reported Superintendent McCulloch. "Montana 8<sup>th</sup> grade students matched the national average score of 152 ranking 16<sup>th</sup> nationally. Our 4<sup>th</sup> grade students scored an average of 149, four points below the national average of 153, ranking 25<sup>th</sup> nationally. This was the first year Montana 4<sup>th</sup> grade students took the NAEP writing test."

"Writing scores for Montana 8<sup>th</sup> graders remained statistically near the same level as the last time the tests were taken in 1998. However, we again saw the trend of students from other states improving their scores at a faster rate than Montana students. In 1998, Montana students averaged two points higher than the national average. This year the national average has caught up to us," noted McCulloch.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly called the "Nation's Report Card", is the only federally mandated survey of student achievement in various subject areas. Authorized by Congress and administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP regularly reports to the public on the educational progress of American students. The website for NAEP is <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

Most states and jurisdictions participated in the 2002 NAEP writing test. In Montana, a random sample of 3247 students in grades 4 and 8 took the 2002 NAEP writing test.

"Montana 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls and boys scored significantly different on the writing tests. Montana girls scored 168, which was 31 points higher than the 137 scored by boys. If you examine the overall scores by gender, Montana 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls would rank 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation among girls. This compares to a ranking of 25<sup>th</sup> by

*"It is our mission to advocate, communicate, educate and be accountable to those we serve."*

Montana boys," said McCulloch. "Since 1998, Montana girls' scores have improved by six points, while boys scores decreased by one point. Nationally, girls performed 21 points higher than boys on the writing tests."

"Many Montana school districts are working hard to update and improve their writing curriculums and assessments. The Montana University system and the Northwest Regional Education Lab have assisted with these efforts. Our educators know the importance of good writing skills for communication, and for improved thinking skills and comprehension.

It's important for Montana leaders and educators to learn from the national assessment about how we can improve the writing skills of all students. The assessment provides us with an opportunity to discover where our strengths and weaknesses lay within Montana. The purpose of assessment is to improve instruction and student learning," Superintendent McCulloch said.

"We need to focus our efforts and resources on the goal of providing a high quality education for all our students. If we don't seriously address the very real problems facing our education system, such as a looming educator shortage and adequate state support for schools, we will very likely see a decline in the quality of the education our children receive. We need to address these problems now. Waiting will only create far worse and more costly problems," concluded McCulloch.

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